



September 5, 2001

Ms. Laura Garza Jimenez
County Attorney
Nueces County
901 Leopard, Room 207
Corpus Christi, Texas 78401-3680

OR2001-3942

Dear Ms. Jimenez:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 151509.

The Nueces County Bail Bond Board (the "board") received a request for a copy of all license applications and fee receipts for five specified companies and another request for a list of all individuals serving on the board's licensing committee. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.130 of the Government Code. You also state that the request implicates the proprietary interests of a third party. In accordance with section 552.305(d) of the Government Code, you notified the potential third party of the request and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See Gov't Code § 552.305(d); see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under Public Information Act in certain circumstances). We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

We note at the outset that you did not submit any responsive information to us pertaining to a list of the individuals who serve on the board's licensing committee. To the extent that you maintain such information, you must provide that information to the requestor at this time. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .301, .302; see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000)

(noting that if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible under circumstances).

Next, we note that section 552.022 of the Government Code makes certain information public, unless it is expressly confidential under other law. One category of public information under section 552.022 is information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body. *See* Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(3). Four of the submitted documents in Attachment 4 are vouchers relating to the expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body, namely Nueces County. You claim that these vouchers are excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.103 of the Government Code. However, section 552.103 is a discretionary exception under the Public Information Act and, as such, does not make information confidential.¹ Therefore, we do not address the board's section 552.103 claim with regard to these four vouchers.

Furthermore, you indicate that these vouchers may contain proprietary information. An interested third party is allowed 10 business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this letter, no third party has submitted any comments to this office explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that any of the submitted vouchers contain proprietary information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990) (stating that if governmental body takes no position, attorney general will grant exception to disclosure under statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.110(a) if third party makes *prima facie* case that information qualifies as trade secret under section 757 of Restatement of Torts, and no argument is presented that rebuts claim as matter of law), 661 at 5-6 (1999) (stating that business enterprise that claims exception for commercial or financial information under Gov't Code § 552.110(b) must show by specific factual evidence that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm).

However, we note that the four vouchers at issue contain account numbers that are subject to section 552.136 of the Government Code. The Seventy-seventh Legislature recently added

¹ Discretionary exceptions are intended to protect only the interests of the governmental body, as distinct from exceptions which are intended to protect information deemed confidential by law or the interests of third parties. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 4 (1994) (governmental body may waive attorney-client privilege, section 552.107(1)), 551 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.103 serves only to protect governmental body's position in litigation and does not itself make information confidential), 473 (1987) (governmental body may waive section 552.111), 522 at 4 (1989) (discretionary exceptions in general). Discretionary exceptions, therefore, do not constitute "other law" that makes information confidential.

section 552.136 to the Public Information Act,² which, among other things, makes account numbers confidential. Senate Bill 694 was passed on May 14, 2001, became effective when it was signed by the Governor on May 26, 2001, and provides, in relevant part, as follows:

Sec. 552.136. CONFIDENTIALITY OF CREDIT CARD, DEBIT CARD, CHARGE CARD, AND ACCESS DEVICE NUMBERS.

(a) In this section, "access device" means a card, plate, code, account number, personal identification number, electronic serial number, mobile identification number, or other telecommunications service, equipment, or instrument identifier or means of account access that alone or in conjunction with another access device may be used to:

(1) obtain money, goods, services, or another thing of value;
or

(2) initiate a transfer of funds other than a transfer originated solely by paper instrument.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.

Act of May 14, 2001, 77th Leg., R.S., S.B. 694, § 1 (to be codified at Gov't Code § 552.136). Accordingly, you must withhold from disclosure the marked account numbers contained within the four vouchers pursuant to section 552.136 of the Government Code. You must release all other information contained within these four vouchers to the requestor.

You claim that the information in Attachments 2 and 3, as well as the remaining information in Attachment 4, is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.103 of the Government Code. Section 552.103 provides in pertinent part:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the

²The Legislature also enacted two other bills that added a section 552.136 to the Public Information Act. One is House Bill 2589, which makes certain e-mail addresses confidential. *See* Act of May 22, 2001, 77th Leg., R.S., H.B. 2589, § 5 (to be codified at Gov't Code § 552.136). The other is Senate Bill 15, which makes information maintained by family violence shelter centers confidential. *See* Act of May 14, 2001, 77th Leg., R.S., S.B. 15, § 1 (to be codified at Gov't Code § 552.136). In addition, Senate Bill 694 enacted the same language from House Bill 2589 regarding the confidentiality of e-mail addresses, but codified it as section 552.137 of the Act. As of the date of this letter ruling, all three of these bills await the Governor's signature.

state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

....

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103. The board has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.--Austin 1997, no pet.); *see also Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.--Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The board must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a). Further, the litigation must be pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the information is requested. *See* Gov't Code § 552.103(c).

You state, and provide documentation showing, that Nueces County is a party to a suit that is currently pending. Therefore, based on your representations and our review of the remaining submitted information, we conclude that the board has demonstrated that Nueces County was involved in litigation prior to the board's receipt of the request for information. We also find that the board has adequately explained how the submitted information relates to the subject matter of the pending litigation. Therefore, we conclude that the submitted information in Attachments 2 and 3, as well as the remaining submitted information in Attachment 4 is excepted from disclosure pursuant to section 552.103 of the Government Code. We note, however, that once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a) and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

In summary, you must release a list of the individuals who serve on the board's licensing committee to the requestor at this time to the extent that you maintain such information. With the exception of the marked account numbers, you must release the four vouchers in

Attachment 4. You may withhold from disclosure the submitted information in Attachments 2 and 3, as well as the remaining submitted information in Attachment 4 pursuant to section 552.103 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

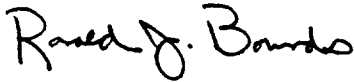
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald J. Bounds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and "B".

Ronald J. Bounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RJB/seg

Ref: ID# 151509

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Delma Marroquin
Luckie's Bail Bonding Service
615 Waco
Corpus Christi, Texas 78401
(w/o enclosures)